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UNCLAS HO CHI MINH CITY 001202

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: DISSIDENT HOANG MINH CHINH RETURNS TO VIETNAM

REF: HCMC 1155

1. (SBU) Early on November 13 democracy activist Tran Khue called us to report that fellow dissident Hoang Minh Chinh and his wife had just returned from the United States. Khue said airport police were trying to confiscate Chinh's passport and other personal documents, but Chinh refused, arguing that such a request was illegal. Khue, democracy activist Do Nam Hai (aka Phuong Nam), and Chinh's son-in-law were at the airport to welcome the Chins.

2. (SBU) Later on Sunday, Hai called us to report that after 3 hours of discussion with the airport police, Chinh and his wife were released without surrendering their documents. They will stay in HCMC for some time with their daughter's family. According to Hai, Chinh appeared much healthier after medical treatment in the U.S. and was "full of energy for fighting." Chinh is supposed to go back to the U.S. for a check-up in six months.

3. (SBU) Comment: Post will monitor the status of Chinh through contacts in the HCMC dissident community, but has no immediate plans to call on Chinh -- unless the authorities step-up their harassment. A visit by USG officials shortly after his return to Vietnam might be construed as a provocation by hardliners -- who, per reftel, already are clamoring for Chinh's scalp -- and weaken the hand of moderates who argue that the best way for Vietnam to deal with Chinh is to ignore him.

WINNICK